Europeanising spaces in Paris, ca. 1947-1962
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Conclusion

‘Notre héritage européen’, suggested Jorge Semprún in 2005, ‘n’a de signification vitale que si nous sommes capable d’en déduire un avenir.’

Looking perpetually backwards and forwards was central to processes of making sense of Europe in Paris in the post-war period. Yet, for all the validity of Semprún’s maxim, it needs to be reconciled with Frederick Cooper’s critique of ‘doing history backwards’. Cooper takes aim at the enlistment of history to try to shed light on the present at the expense of ‘what one does not see: the paths not taken, the dead ends of historical processes, the alternatives that appeared to people in their time.’

Following Cooper, it has been the aim of this thesis not to do history backwards; it is not intended as an exposition of the historical origins or sources of the Europe of today, or as a pre-history of how Europe is understood in Paris and France at the start of the twenty-first century. Rather, by examining a handful of examples it has tried to show how the meaning and course of Europe were understood multifariously in Paris in the post-war historical conjuncture.

Yet, these specific understandings of Europe do nonetheless have value for reflecting on Europe today, not least through what they reveal about the contingency of putatively settled notions of European identity; the shift in the salience of various parameters in the signification of the continent, or the reconfiguration of the constellation of pertinent constitutive elements of ideas of Europe; the essential plurality and opposition of understandings of Europe; how ideas of

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Europe and Europeanness presuppose mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion; and the relationship between the experience of violence and the formation of ideas of Europe.

To take a step back, what exactly have been the findings of this examination of ‘Europeanising spaces’ in Paris, roughly between 1947 and 1962? The notion of Europeanising spaces has been employed to point to forums in the French capital in which ideas about Europe were explicitly or tacitly articulated, exchanged, and contested. Retrospectively, ‘Europe’ tends to be associated in the post-war period almost reflexively with inter-governmental European integration. Though this is taken into account, it is not primarily Europe in this sense that has been our focal point. One aim of the thesis itself might be said to be a Europeanisation of Paris in this period. That is to say, to shed light on aspects of political, social, and cultural life in the city that were implicated in discourse of Europe, and spaces other than those most commonly associated with Europe in the sense of state-level proposals and plans for its integration. Furthermore, our consideration of all these spaces has also referred where appropriate to two important supplemental definitions of Europeanising spaces: first, Europeanisation as the refusal of the closure of the terms ‘Europe’ or ‘Europeanness’; and second, Europeanisation as the disclosure, acknowledgement or appropriation of those terms in spaces whose Europeanness had previously been overlooked or denied. Having reviewed these methodological considerations, let us review the findings of the individual chapters.

The café has previously been identified as a marker of Europe, but a close examination of the Paris café in this period reveals various Europes. A vital forum for the formulation and exchange of ideas in the French capital, this Parisian institution was also a space in which ideas of Europe were put together, questioned and thought through. And while the city’s cafés were a popular site of leisure, they were often a less than effective refuge from the actuality of colonial
conflict and Cold War which prompted a reconsideration of Europe’s place in the world. Furthermore, by analysing Sartre’s reflections on Europe, we have seen that the space of the café, with which his discourse was indelibly associated, lent his discourse a supplemental power.

The urban development of Paris in the post-war years was informed by various understandings and ideas of Europe, and this impacted on the Parisian home, both in the sense of material shelter and civic belonging. Key among these guiding ideas was an equivalence between Europeanisation and modernisation. This was a common thread that connected various ways in which the Paris home was invoked in this period: a shared continent-wide vision of recovery from the Second World War; Paris as sanitised and zoned European capital, which was of course interconnected with an emerging idea of a Europe of mass tourism; and the city’s place in a Europe moulded by the Cold War. Furthermore, the Paris home was a space that was affected by the reformulated conceptions of Europe and Europeanness in the course and aftermath of French decolonisation. In this way, ‘ethnicising’ criteria of Europeanness and non-Europeanness were utilised in housing policy in relation to the home as a space for social engineering, whether through inclusion or relegation. Incoherencies in conceptions of non-Europeans and Europeans in this regard derived in large part from the perpetual imperial dilemma, now reconfigured in the metropole, about the continual need to negotiate exclusion and inclusion. This tension between these continually redrawn boundaries separating European from non-European was exacerbated by the French Republican claim of universalism. Moreover, an examination of the Paris home in this period is revealing of the linking of urban space and discourse of Europe, and counter-inferences that if this Paris was the capital of Europe, those who were excluded from it or devalued within it were in fact no less a part of it.
The urban fabric of the French capital was also seen to be connected to the French Republic’s claim of universalism in the street, and via this claim to a certain notion of European civilisation. The Paris street was also an expression of European identity in street names, while the transgression or appropriation of certain Paris streets was informed by political ideologies and, at least in a secondary way, concomitant ideas about Europe. In certain ways Europe as an identity even impacted on the simple act of walking in the streets, such as during the curfew directed against the city’s Algerian population during the Algerian war. The Paris street was also a forum in which to articulate, contest or reject ideas of Europe in demonstrations, or by placing posters or graffiti on the city’s walls.

An analysis of political spaces in Paris showed us that alternatives to processes of European integration already in existence were considered and advocated. The Mouvement socialiste des états unis d’Europe is interesting as an example of the overlooked socialist tradition of thinking about the idea and identity of Europe. By the time of the rejection of the European Defence Community in Paris in 1954, the dominant idea of Europe within the MSEUE was characterised by a striving for equilibrium and equality, as it had gradually reconciled itself to accepting the European integration process as it was being forged at inter-state level. It was of course problematic to reconcile these stipulations. Equilibrium in the end predisposed the Mouvement to an acceptance of capitalism, the nation as a political unit, and the two bloc system of global power. These had not seemed evidently desirable or inevitable in the heady immediate post-war period and its radical ideas of Europe that lay at the origins of the MSEUE. Neither did its commitment to equality override mechanisms and ideologies of hierarchy and exclusion that informed its vision of Europe and its place in the world. Its insistence on a Europe based on equality of rights did not resolve the problem of who counted as European in the first place. And
though European imperialism might be considered for the most part outdated, the idea of Europe was proffered as the benchmark of progress and development for the continent’s Others, and in turn suggested the continued reliance of the colonial and non-European world on Europe. Interestingly, the fundamental contestation that underlay the notion of Europe was stressed by the MSEUE, particularly in its admission that the process of inter-governmental integration had no monopoly on the label of ‘Europe’, and that Europe was understood otherwise by many Europeans, both in Paris and throughout the continent.

The Fédération des étudiants nationalistes, on the other hand, never had any illusions about its comparable distance from the corridors of power where the Europe of state integration that it derided was being negotiated and advanced. However, it is precisely of interest as a historical actor that campaigned for its alternative vision of the continent with a regretful awareness that it was on the losing side of history, yet also with a conviction that it could regroup to lead European youth to fight for a Europe worthy of the name. This was a Europe defined by hierarchy, the resolve of elites, nationalism, and imperialism – indeed, a Europe constitutionally in excess of itself in extending its sovereignty to the non-European world.

The relevance of cultural spaces in Paris has also been emphasised in terms of thinking about Europe in the post-war period. The prolific and variegated culture of anti-Francoist Spanish exiles in the French capital is illuminating in this regard. While not at all a homogenous bloc, certain interesting aspects of a marked Europeanism informed the cultural output of these Spaniards. These often derived from their understanding of Spanish history which was nonetheless relevant to thinking about the continent generally. One thinks immediately of the treatment of quixotism, the relationship between civilisation, culture, and violence, and delineating insiders and outsiders. Of particular interest are trends of thinking about Europe
including what has been termed a self-ironic Eurocentrism, and the notion of Europeanisation and de-Europeanisation as simultaneously desirable processes. The latter implies that the idea of Europe could be continually deconstructed and constructed in accordance with changed parameters of understanding and commitment.

The relationship between Europeans and non-Europeans that one can glean in the culture of the Spanish exiles is to be teased out more subtly in the work of Jacques Berque and his Mediterranean vision. This most prominent of Parisian Arabists rarely referred directly to Europe, yet it is implied in his articulation of the imperative of reconciliation between Europeans and Arabs that became all the more urgent in the context of the Algerian war. Berque’s work is particularly rich because it foregrounded other ways of thinking about the meaning of Europe and Europeanness. He suggested calling into question hierarchy, privilege and authority. He distrusted rigid and exclusive claims to Europe, and emphasised the necessary labour of reconciling different peoples, rather than trying hastily to transcend or synthesise their differences. It is in this sense that Berque lent his work to thinking about Europe and its Others certainly in terms of realism, but no less in terms of engagement, commitment and faith.

Finally, the space of the work of Henri Cartier-Bresson was rich indeed in terms of impelling his Parisian audiences to reflect on the meaning of Europe in the post-war world. His photographic testimony within and outside Europe suggested a European self-understanding that derived to a significant extent from the experience of violence; the perception of an epochal shift in time; and a Europe that was constituted by a tension between tradition and modernity, and between privilege and deprivation. His representations of Europe, moreover, are no less interesting for their blind spots. His collection *Les Européens*, for instance, does not even allude to the imperialism that to a large degree still underpinned common understandings of Europe,
and which he denounced elsewhere. Also, the malleability of the photographic medium reminds us of the historical contingency of definitions of Europe and Europeanness. This is most evidently seen in the absence of contemporary interpretations of certain photos that would seem more obvious today; as was apparent in relation to his photo of the colonial building in Jakarta (Fig. 5), or of the interpretation of the prescience of his photo of the gare Saint-Lazare (Fig. 6), or indeed of the absence of imperialism in *Les Européens*.

While interpretations of Europe in Paris were multiple, contradictory, and contested in post-war Paris, one can nonetheless point to certain common threads, which is not at all the same thing as claiming that all the invocations of Europe in the examined case studies are equivalent. Perhaps in the first place it should be pointed out that many of the actors involved were very well aware of this multiplicity of interpretations of the meaning of Europe. The FEN noted that the meaning of Europe was not even agreed upon between different groups of the radical right, while a 1954 conference of the MSEUE was told that, ‘L’Europe finit ainsi par être un monstre hybride qui simultanément signifie la paix et la guerre, la liberté et l’esclavage, la prospérité et la misère, une sorte d’espoir menaçant que chacun prétend appeler de ses vœux et qu’il écarte dès qu’il la rencontre.’³ And, as Juan Goytisolo’s 1962 intervention about Spain and Europe in *Les Temps modernes* reminds us, Europe can come to mean quite different things over time.⁴

It is also important to grasp that Europe was not something that could be considered contemplatively, as something ethereal and above the everyday concerns of politics. If various ideas about Europe collided and were fought over, it was also the case that ideas about Europe had to compete with alternative ideas of society and belonging that did not value the importance

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of Europe much or at all, perhaps prioritising instead the French nation or Republic, class, or the universal. Another related aspect of this contestation of ideas was the denial that certain conceptions of the continent could be deemed to be any kind of Europe at all. Hence Jean-Marie Domenach’s denunciation of false Europes; the French Communist party, the FEN and others’ dismissal of the authenticity of the Europe conceived along the lines of post-war economic integration; or Denis de Rougemont’s contention that Sartre’s representation of Europe was merely a projection onto the continent of French colonialism, and that this was a travesty of Enlightenment Europe and its legacy to the world.

To the disdain of some and the satisfaction of others, neither were the Europes examined in this thesis detachable from the wider non-European world. For many different actors in the French capital in this period, Europe made little sense without taking account of its relation with the non-European world. This is not merely to say that Europe could not be conceived of in isolation. Rather it was to claim that Europe was, in some sense and to some degree, defined by its interaction with the non-European world. Europe here was constitutively in excess of itself. It emerged in its non-European surplus.

Of course this need not imply the kind of reciprocity, openness and mutual recognition that Berque sought, or the radical universalism that underpinned the critique of Europe by figures like Sartre or Césaire. It was just as likely to be represented in a rather more chauvinist imperialist form. One thinks of Maurice Papon’s 1955 lament that Europe was being reduced to its ‘espace européenne’. This was consonant with the FEN’s insistence on the imperial nature of Europe. And we have seen that socialists such as Guy Mollet insisted similarly on the integrity of imperialism to Europe. Even by the time decolonisation came to be accepted as inevitable in France, this standpoint was often apparent in a recalibrated adherence to European colonialism,
or in a version of Wallerstein’s ‘European universalism’. Both in turn impacted on notions of Europeanness and indeed non-Europeanness in Paris, particularly with regard to immigrants and especially the city’s Algerian population.

Another trend in the examples of Europeanising spaces observed in this thesis has been that of a Europe as an ongoing project, as something to be made. Sartre said as much about a socialist Europe in 1947. The MSEUE took upon itself the same task that same year, albeit with a quite different interpretation of what this Europe would look like. Jacques Berque insisted on the necessity of the ongoing development of the relation between Europe and the Arab world, and suggested that the self-understanding of each would only be refined by their developing understanding of each other. One can also understand Europeanisation as the making of Europe in terms of an ongoing labour of interpretation as to what Europe meant or should mean. In this sense, the photographic work of Henri Cartier-Bresson in his 1955 Louvre exhibition, and in his works *D’une Chine à l’autre*, and *Les Européens* was significant; particularly in terms of adumbrating how reflecting on the continent’s experience of violence, thinking about temporality, and connections to the non-European world all demanded a continual rethinking of ideas of Europe.

The violence that Cartier-Bresson revealed as integral to thinking about Europe was common to many other Parisian spaces in which understandings of the continent were represented. Accordingly, if Europeanisation on the one hand was about making Europe, on the other it involved its unmaking. That is to say that thinking about Europe necessitated rationalising its own internal and external violence, both of which involved its own degradation. This of course ran contrary to the position of the likes of Papon and the FEN for whom Europe

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was being unmade precisely by a lack of commitment to sufficient violence to maintain European imperial hegemony. But ideas about Europe and Europeanness considered in this thesis invariably grappled in some way with the violence that was the devastation of the social fabric of European societies in the thirty-year catastrophe from 1914; the trauma, repressed or explicit, of the Second World War; colonial wars, including colonial violence in Paris itself; and the Cold War and the prospect of further conflict and of utter destruction after which Europe would constitute nothing more than a nuclear wasteland. The relationship between civilisation and violence was a recurring theme in the cultural output of Spanish anti-Francoist exiles in Paris, of course. We have also seen that symbolic violence permeated discourse about Europe in the sense of exclusion and devaluation, whether through administrative norms of Europeanness and non-Europeanness, or even in a momentary gaze, as in the experience of the Paris bidonvilles residents.

Finally, a Europe of radical possibility. An immediate qualification is called for here. Most ideas of Europe in post-war Paris grappled with the continent’s coming down in the world. That Europe did so was generally felt to be regrettable, and often the way it did so to be dishonourable. Yet there was also a sense that perhaps the embers of Walter Benjamin’s Vesuvius-like Paris had not quite cooled. For ideas about Europe were formulated in a city in which the belief persisted that society and politics could, or should, or would be radically different. This is not a mood that one could obviously point to elsewhere in Europe at this time. But nor was this Parisian attitude exclusive to leftist circles; ‘the future is ours’, FEN posters proclaimed to passers-by. Or there is the example of Robert Schuman who likened the provisions for European integration of the Treaty of Paris in 1951 to the world-historical import of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. Pascale Casanova describes how the strategy of
literary figures aimed to appropriate precisely this sort of radical symbolic capital in Paris.⁶ And for all the limitations of this kind of argument, one ignores it at the price of missing something key about discourse about Europe in Paris in the early post-war era.